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Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
----------085407 221617Z /40
O P 221221Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 7315
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV NIACT IMMEDIATE
USMISSION USUN NIACT IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY
USINT BAGHDAD PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 1598

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR MOPS MARR SY LE IZ
SUBJECT: SOUTH LEBANON: MOVEMENT OF IRAQI TRUCK CONVOYS

REF: A) DAMASCUS 1578 B) STATE 71173 C) STATE 72516

SUMMARY: KHADDAM DOWNPLAYS PRACTICAL IMPORT OF IRAQI CONVOYS AND SAYS SYRIA IS COMMITTED TO FACILITATING DELIVERY OF HELP TO PALESTINIANS. SYRIA CONGRATULATES USG FOR ITS WORK ON BEHALF OF SC RES 425 AND PLEDGES FULL SYRIAN SUPPORT AGAINST ANY ATTEMPTS TO SABOTAGE LEBANESE STABILITY AFTER REPEAT AFTER ISRAEL IMPLEMENTS WITHDRAWAL AND UN FORCES ARE IN PLACE. ASSAD'S TRIP TO INDIA IS POSTPONED. WILL SEE KHADDAM AGAIN AS SOON AS SIILASVUO HAS BROACHED CONCEPT OF ADF MOVE TO LITANI. END SUMMARY

1. KHADDAM CALLED ME IN EVENING MARCH 21. AFTER EXPRESSING REGRET HE HAD BEEN UNABLE TO SEE ME EARLIER, HE OBSERVED THAT ISRAELI INVASION OF SOUTH LEBANON HAD LEFT ARAB WORLD
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PUZZLED AND GREATLY ANGERED. THE ADF, "BEING UNDER ORDERS OF SARKIS AND OPERATING AS LEBANESE FORCE," HAD NOT PARTICIPATED IN FIGHTING. HOWEVER, NEITHER SYRIA NOR ANY OTHER ARAB COUNTRY COULD REMAIN INACTIVE IN FACE OF ISRAELI ATTACK ON ANOTHER ARAB STATE. REFERRING TO ASSAD'S MARCH 18 SPEECH AT THE EUPHRATES DAM CEREMONIES, KHADDAM DESCRIBED IT AS "ONLY NATURAL FOR

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SYRIA TO FACILITATE THE DELIVERY OF ANY HELP IT CAN TO THE
PALESTINIANS."

2. RE UN DEVELOPMENTS, HE SAID THAT DAMASCUS
CONSIDERED RAPID IMPLEMENTATION OF RES 425, UNCONDITIONAL
ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL AND RAPID ENTRY OF UN FORCES TO THE
SOUTH TO HELP THE GOL EXTEND ITS CONTROL TO THE BORDER
AS THE MAJOR ELEMENTS NEEDED TO ACHIEVE PEACE IN
THE REGION. SC RESOLUTION MUST BE QUICKLY IMPLEMENTED,
OTHERWISE CONDITIONS WILL RAPIDLY DETERIORATE.

3. FONMIN EXTENDED SYRIA'S SPECIAL THANKS TO USG
FOR AMERICAN ATTITUDE IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL
LAST WEEK-END AND ITS SUCCESSFUL EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF
RESOLUTION 425. SYRIA WAS "GREATLY SATISFIED" WITH
THE RESULTS AND HE ASKED ME TO CONVEY HIS PERSONAL
APPRECIATION TO THE SECRETARY.

4. TURNINJSTO ISSUE OF IRAQI CONVOYS, KHADDAM SAID HE
HAD STUDIED OUR MESSAGE (REF B). HE CONSIDERED
SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS ACTIVITY SHOULD NOT REPEAT NOT BE
EXAGGERATED. "A FEW HUNDRED VOLUNTEERS" HAD ARRIVED IN THE CONVOYS;
THE GREAT MAJORITY OF THESE WERE PALESTINIANS RESIDENT IN
IRAQ. REFERRING TO MY CONVERSATION A FEW HOURS
EARLIER WITH DEPFONMIN QADDUR (REF A), KHADDAM NOTED THAT
SYRIA SHARED OUR CONCERN ABOUT DANGERS IN THE INTERIM
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PERIOD PRIOR TO ARRIVAL OF UN FORCES. TO MINIMIZE SUCH DANGERS,
US MUST USE ITS INFLUENCE TO SECURE IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION. I ASSURED HIM WE WERE
WORKING TO SECURE FULL AND RAPID ISRAELI
WITHDRAWAL FROM THE AREA BUT AS REGARDS INTIMATELY
RELATED QUESTION OF NO ONE COULD PREDICT HOW MANY WEEKS WOULD
BE REQUIRED TO GET NEW UN FORCE FULLY OPERATIONAL. IN MEANTIME,
DANGERS WERE HIGH AND ANY INCIDENTS WHICH PALESTINIAN ELEMENTS
MIGHT CAUSE RISKED DESTROYING CEASEFIRE. KHADDAM REPLIED THAT
SYRIA OFFICIALLY SUPPORTS SC RESOLUTION 425 AND WILL EXERT
EVERY EFFORT TO ASSURE ITS IMPLEMENTATION. HE HAD JUST
GIVEN THIS SAME ASSURANCE TO LEBANESE PRIME MINISTER HOSS.

5. I ASKED WHAT ATTITUDE HOSS HAD EXPRESSED TOWARD ARRIVAL
OF IRAQI FORCES AND OF ANY OTHER ARAB FORCES NOT OPERATING
UNDER ADF CONTROL. KHADDAM RESPONSED THAT USE OF WORD
"FORCES" WAS MISLEADING. NO ORGANIZED UNITS HAD
ARRIVED FROM IRAQ. SARG AND GOL AGREED THAT ANY
ORGANIZED FORCE ENTERING THE COUNTRY MUST HAVE THE
APPROVAL OF THE LEBANESE AUTHORITIES. HE ADDED THAT
THE MAJOR PART OF THE CARGO CARRIED BY THE IRAQI CONVOY
HAD BEEN MEDICAL AND RELIEF SUPPLIES. I REPLIED THAT

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WE MUST NOT PLAY WITH LABELS; IN MANY CASES, WHAT HAD TORN
LEBANON APART IN THE CIVIL WAR WAS THE WORK OF LOOSELY ORGANIZED
MILITIA AND EVEN INDIVIDUALLY INITIATED ACTS OF VIOLENCE.

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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 1598

EXDIS

6. I TRIED TO GET HIM TO SAY THAT SYRIA
WOULD BLOCK FUTURE CONVOYS. HIS MOST SPECIFIC REPLY
WAS THAT ONCE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL WAS COMPLETED "ALL
VOLUNTEERS" WOULD WITHDRAW AND SYRIA WOULD ACT TO
PREVENT ANY PARTY FROM TRYING TO SABOTAGE LEBANESE
STABILITY. I REPLIED THAT SYRIAN
LEADERSHIP MUST DRAW UP A BALANCE SHEET AND JUDGE WHETHER
ALLOWING "A FEW HUNDRED VOLUNTEERS", AS HE HAD DESCRIBED THEM,
TO JOIN THE PALESTINIANS ALREADY IN LEBANON WAS WORTH
THE RISK IT CONSTITUTED OF REIGNITING THE FIGHTING.
WE CONSIDERED THIS A HIGH RISK. HE REPEATED THAT SYRIA
WILL WORK "IMMEDIATELY ON IMPLEMENTATION OF SC RESOLUTION"
TO END ALL PROVOCATIONS WHICH WOULD THREATEN AN EXPLOSION IN
LEBANON.

7. COMMENT: THE SYRIANS WANT TO BOTH HAVE THEIR CAKE AND
EAT IT. THEY WANT CEASEFIRE TO LAST AND RES 425 TO BE IMPLEMENTED
BUT ALSO WANT TO KEEH THE IRAQIS, EGYPTIANS, AND POSSIBLY
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LIBYANS AS WELL, FROM SCORING PROPAGANDA SUCCESSES AGAINST SYRIA.
THEY SEEM TO HAVE DECIDED SUCH ATTACKS WOULD BE DAMAGING WERE
DAMASCUS TO REFUSE TO ALLOW TRANSIT OF THE CONVOYS.
KHADDAM WAS ENGAGING IN OBVIOUS DECEPTION IN LABELING IRAQI
FORCES AS VOLUNTEERS (OTHER SOURCES APPEAR TO CONFIRM ALF UNITS
WERE INVOLVED), BUT THIS DISTINCTION MAY BE HELPFUL TO SYRIA IN
TAKING TOUGHER LINE IN FUTURE. IF THEY DO INTERDICT FUTURE
TRANSITS, THEY WILL PROBABLY DO SO WITHOUT ANNOUNCING SUCH A
DECISION AND WITHOUT INFORMING US. I ASSUMED HOSS MADE
LEBANESE CASE AGAINST THE CONVOYS AND WILL BE ADVISING EMBASSY
BEIRUT HOW HE THINKS THE SYRIANS WILL ACT. KHADDAM'S ATTITUDE
TOWARDS CONVOYS STRONGLY SUGGESTS.
SYRIANS ARE NOT YET READY TO SUPPRESS FEDAYEEN FORCES.

8. THIS MEETING TOOK PLACE PRIOR TO RECEIPT STATE 72516.
BECAUSE OF LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS, ASSAD HAS POSTPONED
HIS VISIT TO INDIA SCHEDULED TO START MARCH 22. I WILL
HIT KHADDAM AGAIN AS SOON AS SIILASVUO HAS SEEN HIM RE
CONCEPT OF ADF MOVE TO LITANI. PREDICT ASSAD WILL WANT
EXPLICIT, IDEALLY PUBLIC, REQUEST FROM BOTH SARKIS
AND UN BEFORE HE AGREES TO THAT MOVE WHICH WILL HAVE HIGHLY
SENSITIVE IMPLICATIONS FOR SYRIAN-PLO RELATIONSHIP.
PUBLIC ISRAELI SILENCE ABOUT ITS EXPECTATIONS OF SYRIA'S
POLICEMAN ROLE WILL ALSO BE HIGHLY DESIRABLE FOR SAME REASONS.
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